

Unit 1: Dissertation

Introduction

The Dissertation provides learners with the opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding of a selected topic.

Unit 1: Dissertation differs from *Unit 2: Investigation/Field Study* in the way in which information is collected. In *Unit 1: Dissertation*, there is no requirement to use specific research instruments (eg measurements, experiments, observations, surveys, interviews, questionnaires) to collect data, and there is likely to be greater focus on secondary sources.

The unit requires the learner to plan, research, analyse information and then evaluate and review the project. The findings and recommendations will then be presented by the learner to a selected audience.

The unit requires learners to take an active role in managing the project and provides opportunities to develop skills in decision making, problem solving and communicating. It also introduces learners to the techniques and methods of research.

It is estimated that the dissertation produced will be between 5000-6000 words in length. Learners will not be penalised for producing work outside the suggested word count, but they should ensure their word count allows them to meet the assessment objectives.

Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Be able to identify, plan and manage a dissertation project
- 2 Be able to undertake research, collect evidence and select information using appropriate methodology
- 3 Be able to interpret evidence, draw conclusions and write up results into a finished dissertation
- 4 Be able to present findings, conclusions and an evaluation to an audience.

The assessment evidence presented by the learner must evidence all the above outcomes.

QCF unit summary

Outcome Number	Learning Outcome The learner will:	Assessment The learner can:
1	Be able to identify, plan and manage a dissertation project	identify the main objectives for the project provide an appropriate plan use organisational skills and strategies appropriately
2	Be able to undertake research, collect evidence and select information using appropriate methodology	select relevant information from appropriate sources obtain data or information relate resources to the research question or hypothesis
3	Be able to interpret evidence, draw conclusions and write up results into a finished dissertation	produce a dissertation using appropriate style and structure interpret evidence gathered discuss different perspectives draw conclusions
4	Be able to present findings, conclusions and an evaluation to an audience.	review and evaluate the project and own learning present the project outcomes in an organised manner, engaging with audience and responding to questions.

Unit content

1 Be able to identify, plan and manage a dissertation project

Identifying and planning the project

Learners should select a topic from an area which interests them. They should conduct a literature review to help them narrow down the topic to a working title, which is likely to be in the form of a question or problem. Before they begin, learners should be clear about what they plan to investigate and how they will do it.

As part of their proposal, learners must complete the Project Proposal Form (Annexe B). This must be signed off by the teacher-assessor before any further work can be carried out. For further information, see pages 56-57). The title/topic must be considered suitable by the teacher-assessor, be capable of investigation and suitable in size and scale to be completed in the time available.

Completed project proposal forms should include objectives and a rationale for their choice of topic/title. They should also identify the proposed activities that they will need to undertake, for example:

- Background reading
- Conducting research
- Analysing information and drawing conclusions
- Writing up the project, checking and re-drafting
- Evaluating the project and own learning
- Preparing for the presentation.

Plans should also include the resources that they will require and an attempt to prepare for contingencies.

Managing the project

During the course of the project, learners must keep individual 'project activity records' which document its progress, the activities undertaken and decision-making process, eg by means of a diary, IT logging system or records of periodic reviews with the teacher-assessor.

Learners should monitor their own progress, adapting their plan and adjusting their timelines where necessary; where this occurs, this should be recorded in the project activity records.

Summary of evidence required from learner

- The project proposal form
- Project activity records.

2 Be able to undertake research, collect evidence and select information using appropriate methodology

Learners should:

- research, analyse and interpret information from sources
- extract, interpret and summarise information
- show connections between ideas, information, sources, etc
- present the research in a coherent, well-organised manner
- be independently motivated and seek out their own research material
- make use of the distinction between fact, speculation and subjective opinion in evaluating reliability of sources.

Unit 1: Dissertation and *Unit 2: Investigation/Field Study* have a different focus in this learning outcome. In *Unit 2: Investigation/Field Study*, learners will use particular research instruments (eg measurements, experiments, observations, surveys, interviews, questionnaires) to collect data. In *Unit 1: Dissertation*, the use of these types of research instruments are not required, and there is likely to be greater focus on secondary sources.

Learners should also use skills gained from the taught element of the course to comment on the reliability and validity of sources by distinguishing between primary and secondary sources, as well as distinguishing between facts, speculation and subjective opinion. For example, learners should note whether the source of information comes from a newspaper summary of original research (and may therefore be abridged or even misrepresented). They should also be sensitive to the fact that particular sources will offer biased views.

Learners should make use of a consistent system of referencing. References should make clear which author is being quoted, and from where the quotation comes. There should also be a bibliography which uses an appropriate and consistent format.

Summary of evidence required from learner

- Research carried out. This is likely to be contained within relevant sections of the dissertation (see learning outcome 3).

3 Be able to interpret evidence, draw conclusions and write up results into a finished dissertation

The dissertation needs to be organised. There are different ways of structuring a dissertation, which will vary depending on the nature of the question and the type of research carried out. One possible structure is as follows:

- Introduction
- Chapter 1
- Chapter 2
- Chapter 3
- Conclusion
- References and bibliography.

The different sections should all follow each other in a logical manner.

The introduction will include an explanation of the question or problem and a rationale for the choice of this question, eg why it is important or interesting to the learner.

The sections can be organised in different ways, but the dissertation should describe previous published studies that are relevant to the question. Learners should acknowledge alternative interpretations or arguments and assess them critically, evaluating their strengths and weaknesses, defending their own arguments against possible objections.

The dissertation should also include a conclusion, summarising what has been found in relation to the original question or problem. There should also be recommendations, eg wider implications, suggestions for further work, etc.

Learners should be encouraged to plan and draft their work before producing the finished dissertation.

Care should be taken with to the presentation of the dissertation, with appropriate use made of headings, paragraphing, page numbering, labelling of diagrams, and font size and style. Learners should also take care to use language accurately and appropriately, eg spelling, grammar, punctuation, technical language, and an appropriately neutral or formal style.

For more information about the referencing and bibliography, see learning outcome 2, above.

Summary of evidence required from learner

- The dissertation.

4 Be able to present findings, conclusions and an evaluation to an audience

The evaluation

Learners must produce an evaluation of the project. Some or all of it could be included within the dissertation itself, or it could be a separate piece of work.

The evaluation should aim to address the following areas:

- The extent to which they achieved what they set out to achieve
- Possible weaknesses in, and limitations of, their methodology and interpretations
- How well they performed at different stages of the project
- What they would do differently next time and why
- What they have learned about conducting research and writing a dissertation, and how useful this has been to them
- What they have learned about their own strengths and weaknesses and how they could make use of this in the future.

The presentation

The findings should be presented to an audience. This should summarise what the dissertation is about, what was done, the findings and conclusions that can be drawn from it.

It must be appropriate to the selected audience, in terms of length, language used, room selected and conditions, and also any handouts and ICT used.

The presentation must demonstrate the use of appropriate communication skills and the learner should be able to respond to questioning from the audience in a capable manner.

Further information about the presentation is given on pages 53-54.

Summary of evidence required from learner

- The evaluation
- The presentation and any supporting material.

Mark grid for Dissertation

Dissertation- AO1 - Manage

Band 1	Band 2	Band 3
<p>The research question is identified and developed with a lot of guidance, support and assistance from the teacher-assessor.</p> <p>The project plan gives objectives for the project and a brief rationale. Most of the main tasks to be completed are provided in an appropriate order. Some potential problems are identified and there are basic ideas for how to overcome them.</p> <p>The learner shows limited organisational ability and time management skills when managing the project. The learner maintains cursory records of activities undertaken during the project. There is some monitoring of own progress.</p>	<p>The research question is identified and developed with some guidance, support and assistance from the teacher-assessor and is then finalised and refined by the learner.</p> <p>The project plan gives clear objectives for the project and a clear rationale. All of the main tasks to be completed are provided in an appropriate order and described. The plan includes information on how learners will organise their time in order to meet the project objectives. Potential problems are described and there are realistic and convincing ideas for to overcome them.</p> <p>The learner shows reasonable organisational ability and time management skills when managing the project. The learner maintains clear records of activities undertaken during the project, including problems encountered and steps taken to overcome them. Progress is monitored against the original plan.</p>	<p>The research question is identified and developed with limited guidance, support and assistance from the teacher-assessor but is then finalised and refined independently by the learner.</p> <p>The project plan is clear and concise, with clear and detailed objectives and rationale. All of the main tasks to be completed are provided in an appropriate order and described in detail. The plan includes detailed and realistic information on how the learners will organise their time in order to meet the project objectives, with an appropriate time span allocated for each task. Potential problems are described in detail and listed in order of likelihood and seriousness and there are realistic and convincing ideas for to overcome them.</p> <p>The learner shows a high level of organisational ability and time management skills when managing the project. The learner maintains clear and detailed records of activities undertaken during the project, including problems encountered and steps taken to overcome them. Progress is monitored against the original plan and adjustments made to the plan where necessary.</p>
1-3 marks	4-6 marks	7-9 marks

See pages 51-52 for guidance on how to allocate marks

Dissertation - A02 - Use resources

Band 1	Band 2	Band 3
<p>Some resources have been used and investigated.</p> <p>Information and resources have been selected and some of this is directly relevant to the research question. The information has been collated in reference to the research question posed. There are attempts to establish links and connections between the information used, but some of these may be tenuous.</p> <p>Some understanding of the less complex areas of the research topic has been shown. The learner makes some attempt to evaluate the reliability of sources, but this is not always effective.</p> <p>There is some referencing of sources and a bibliography is included, listing most of the sources.</p>	<p>A range of different types of resources have been used and investigated.</p> <p>Information and resources relevant to the research question have been selected. The information has been analysed in reference to the research question posed. The learner has established clear links and connections between the information used.</p> <p>A reasonable understanding of the complexities of the research area in general, and the research question in particular, has been shown. The learner is generally effective in evaluating the reliability of sources.</p> <p>Sources are referenced appropriately and a bibliography is included, listing the sources in an appropriate format.</p>	<p>A wide range of different types of resources have been used and thoroughly investigated.</p> <p>Information and resources relevant to the research question have been carefully selected. The information has been analysed and synthesised in reference to the research question posed. Clear, concise and detailed links have been established between the information used.</p> <p>A thorough understanding of the complexities of the research question has been shown. Learners have placed the research question into a wider context of the research area. The learner makes use of the distinction between fact, speculation and subjective opinion in evaluating the reliability of sources and does this consistently effectively.</p> <p>Sources are referenced appropriately and consistently and a bibliography is included, listing the sources in an appropriate and consistent format.</p>
1-4 marks	5-8 marks	9-12 marks

See pages 51-52 for guidance on how to allocate marks

Dissertation - AO3 - Develop and realise

Band 1	Band 2	Band 3
<p>An attempt has been made to structure the dissertation, using sections.</p> <p>Information is generally presented in a logical order, although some of this may not be wholly relevant. Some use is made of techniques that aid clarity, eg numbering, headings, paragraphing, labelling. Language errors (eg grammar, syntax, vocabulary) may sometimes be intrusive but they generally do not interfere with communication. Some technical terms are used.</p> <p>The content shows some understanding of the topic and an attempt to answer the research question. There is a brief conclusion that summarises the point of view and the case that has been made.</p>	<p>The dissertation is structured in sections and there is some evidence of the ability to link them together coherently.</p> <p>Information is presented in a logical order and is generally clear and relevant. Generally effective use is made of techniques that aid clarity, eg numbering, headings, paragraphing, labelling. There are few language errors (eg grammar, syntax, vocabulary), which are generally not intrusive and do not interfere with communication. Technical terms are generally used appropriately.</p> <p>The content shows good understanding of the topic area and an argument that answers the research question. Some counter arguments or alternative interpretations are considered in the discussion. There is a clear conclusion that summarises the point of view and the case that has been made. There are some suggestions for further work.</p>	<p>The dissertation is well structured, with appropriate sections that are linked together coherently throughout.</p> <p>Information is presented in a logical order and it is consistently clear and relevant. Effective and consistent use is made of techniques that aid clarity, eg numbering, headings, paragraphing, labelling. There are few language errors (eg grammar, syntax, vocabulary) which are not intrusive and do not interfere with communication. Technical terms are used consistently and effectively.</p> <p>The content shows a thorough and perceptive understanding of the topic area and a clearly argued and well-thought out argument that answers the research question and is supported by several lines of reasoning. Counter arguments or alternative interpretations are considered carefully and systematically in the discussion. There is a clear and well developed conclusion that proficiently summarises the point of view and the case that has been made. There are well-thought out suggestions for further work and an awareness of any wider implications.</p>
1-8 marks	9-16 marks	17-24 marks

See pages 51-52 for guidance on how to allocate marks

Dissertation -AO4 - Review

Band 1	Band 2	Band 3
<p>Overall the learner shows some self-awareness when evaluating the project and the extent to which they have achieved their aims. The learner attempts to identify both their own strengths and weaknesses in general and also more specifically the limitations of their project's methodology and interpretations. However these may not always correspond with other evidence seen by the teacher-assessor as part of the project. The learner identifies some basic ideas for what they could do differently next time. They have drawn basic conclusions about the process of researching and writing a dissertation that could help them in future.</p> <p>The presentation is structured so that the audience can see that there has been some attempt to organise it logically. If an oral presentation is given, it is generally audible, although it is likely that the learner relies heavily on supporting materials, eg notes or cue cards. Where visual aids are used, these attempt to support the presentation, although they may not be clearly visible to the audience and may contain too much information.</p> <p>Some questions are answered and the learner shows reasonable subject knowledge.</p>	<p>Overall the learner shows good insight and self-awareness in evaluating the project and the extent to which they have achieved their aims. The learner is generally successful at identifying and explaining both their own strengths and weaknesses in general and also more specifically the limitations of their project's methodology and interpretations. These generally correspond with other evidence seen by the teacher-assessor as part of the project. The learner describes ideas for what they could do differently next time. They have drawn clear conclusions about the process of researching and writing a dissertation that could help them in future.</p> <p>The presentation is structured so that it is reasonably clear to the audience how it is organised and how the different parts link together. If an oral presentation is given, it is audible, although it is likely that the learner relies on supporting materials, eg notes or cue cards, but there are parts of the presentation that are not simply read aloud. Where visual aids are used, these are relevant and are reasonably effective at supporting the presentation. They show reasonable clarity and design.</p> <p>Questions are answered reasonably clearly and effectively and the learner shows reasonable subject knowledge.</p>	<p>Overall the learner shows a high level of insight and self-awareness in evaluating the project and the extent to which they have achieved their aims. The learner is highly adept at identifying and analysing in detail both their own strengths and weaknesses in general and also more specifically the limitations of their project's methodology and interpretations. These correspond well with other evidence seen by the teacher-assessor as part of the project. The learner explains and justifies ideas for what they could do differently next time. They have drawn clear and perceptive conclusions about the process of researching and writing a dissertation that could help them in future.</p> <p>The presentation is clearly and logically structured so that it is completely clear to the audience how the different parts link together. If an oral presentation is given, it is clearly audible throughout. The learner may make some use of supporting materials, eg notes of cue cards, but the presentation is not simply read aloud. Where visual aids are used, these are relevant and are consistently effective at supporting the presentation. They are clearly visible to the audience, are well designed and do not contain too much information.</p> <p>The learner handles questions calmly and confidently. Questions are answered clearly and insightfully and the learner shows good subject knowledge.</p>
1-3 marks	4-6 marks	7-9 marks

See pages 51-52 for guidance on how to allocate marks

Total marks out of 54.